

THE PROGRESS OF FASHION.

By “*The Hermit in London.*”

WHAT is fashion? a name, a word—is it an empty one? a mere whim, chimera, or fantasy? Certainly not. Fashion (derived from the French term *façon*) is manner in acting, style in dress; for instance, “*c’est la façon de faire qui fait tout.*” The manner here enhances the act, it constitutes its chief merit, it gives grace to an ordinary action. Of this description is, or rather *ought to be*, fashion; an elegant manner of arranging ornaments, a tasty way of putting on dresses, a finish in style, something becoming in its nature and in the disposition of its component

parts. Mode, or *la mode*, derived from the Latin word *modus*, is a synonymous term; the method, or form, of performing any thing, the peculiar way of adjusting an article of dress, both equally producing effect, which is the soul of fashion, and the end prepared by every action; *est modus in rebus*, shews us that without the *modus*, confusion, or want of effect, would naturally occur. Thus it is, in like manner, with the operations of dress depending on the harmony of colours, the concordance of forms, the proportions suited to stature, and the character of the

costume, suited to age, sex, and to condition in life. All other fashion is spurious; it may depend upon the *concelto*, or conceit of a Princess, or a mantua-maker, a Duke or a tailor, a public performer, a courtesan, or any private individual gifted with beauty, possessed of rank and influence, or thrust into notoriety (which some mistake for fashion) by some adventitious circumstance. The latter species of fashion is hazardous, and should be avoided; the former qualities constituting its very essence, ought to be the rules undeviatingly followed by the *beau monde*, and those who imitate this elevated class in society. If the votaries of fashion follow the caprice of an individual, or are entrapped by the artifices of dress-makers, *modistes*, tailors, drapers, &c., they will certainly not preserve the *beau idéal* in dress, and will be the dupes of those who are intrusted in creating rapidly succeeding novelties for the sake of trade, or of the higher misleader, who invents a fashion either to exercise a tyranny over his or her imitators, to favour some peculiarity of form or complexion, or to conceal some personal defect. For example, a lady having a speck on one eye, will strive to conceal it by a curl of certain magnitude, which would disfigure and obscure the beauty of a polished brow, where two bright stars gave the finish of expression and fascination. Large and long sleeves would wisely cover red, or spare arms; whilst the exposure of alabaster ones, and the *épaule naissante*, would be powerful magnets to a female more favoured by nature; wadding would fill up the spare breast and shoulders of a raw-boned gentleman, whilst a nearer adherence to natural form would set off the well-made man; and, *simili modo*, large loose pantaloons would put the bandy beau on a footing with him whose proportions might suit the statue of an Apollo Belvidere.

Having noticed the existence of fashion, let us mark its progress, particularly within the last few years.—The finest original models which we have of dress are of the Greek and Roman schools. Painters and sculptors continue to draw and delineate from these. The costume of eastern nations has its richness and grandeur; but to Greece and Rome must we still refer for taste and magnificence, for lightly

flowing drapery, the rich folds of well-managed garments, the stately robe, loose floating dresses, elastic form, for the cestus, the tiara, the sandal, tunic, &c., with all that can be taken from the breathing canvas, or striking statuary. To these models, the British fair, in particular, have frequently recurred; and when the French and Spanish costumes prevailed in remoter ages, art triumphed over nature, and fine forms were disguised by long waists, stomachers, whalebone, ruffs, high-heeled shoes, fly-caps, and the like; whilst the men were masqueraded by whalebone skirts, perukes of strange forms and fancies, encumbering finery, and effeminate ornaments, such as muffs, solitaires, red heels, &c. After a long lapse of time dress was much simplified, and a convenient and tolerably becoming style of the *unie*, replete with neatness, characterized the inhabitants of Europe, but most especially the British nation, for the inhabitants of the Continent preserved, for a long time, the obsolete style of darker and feudal times, the lady's hoop maintaining its place at court, and the cocked-hat, pig-tail, side curls, or *aile de pigeon*, making the man stiff and antiquated, at the theatres and public walks. During the course of the two last wars, our ladies exercised much variety and fancy in their dress, assuming at times the style of the Greek and Roman models, at others going into all the simplicity of the cottage bonnet and the rural garb; sometimes charming in a display of glossy locks, "when unadorned adorned the most;" at others triumphing over hearts with nodding plumes, bracelets, armlets, annulets, and other spells and trappings; whilst the other sex appeared as much *à la militaire*, as plain clothes could permit.

At the epoch of peace, foreign fashions were exclusively introduced for our British *belles*, and London seemed like Paris transported into our metropolis. As to the *bon ton*, the ancient style gave way, and the modern had its reign; but whilst female dress was imported from Paris, the Paris muscadin was *tout à fait à l'Anglaise*.

After a short period, taste and fancy again resumed their operations, and we were not mere copyists: pictures were consulted; the Marie Stuart was assum-

ed; the dresses represented in the novel of Kenilworth Castle, and other imitations of dramatic appearance. Dress then was, and still is, not of the Gothic order, or of any of the Greek orders, but of the Composite, displaying a mixture of the graces of the ancients, and the convenience and simplicity of the moderns.

We cannot, amongst the varieties of late years, admire the *gigot* sleeve, nor the still larger ones *à l'imbécile*; but in other respects, Queen Elizabeth ruffs, Marie Stuart head-dresses, and other picture copies, are not without their merit and attractions, and the composite order seems to be the most perfect hitherto known; but then women cannot too scrupulously examine and adopt what is becoming, nor too studiously avoid all monstrosities, such as tower of Babel bonnets, pokes, flapping sleeves, enormous bustles, roundabouts which make them like Dutch toys, excessively short, or immoderately long petticoats. The coats, waistcoats, and trowsers of our *beaux*, have nothing of character or dignity in them, but it would be difficult to procure a substitute for them. Costumes, such as the Highland garb, the helmet, cuirass, and gauntlet of the military, are dignified and imposing; but such costume not being universal, cannot be included under the head of dress in general. Loose and flowing drapery must always be more graceful than tight habiliments, except for females, when it becomes desirable to exhibit a part of the form undisguised. To those varieties of dress attributed to fashion, but much more

dependant upon the interest of trade, the influence of individuals, the caprices of beauty, and the fancy of the leaders of *bon ton*, a certain degree of compliance and of resistance should be made by good sense and good taste, in leaning more to what is becoming, than to what is novel and generally worn. Small figures should wear nothing to diminish them, over tall ones should avoid longitudinal additions; spare bodies require support and amplification; corpulency can admit of no such enlargements; defects call for concealment; beauty shines (modestly, be it understood) unaided and alone; flowers are the natural companions of youth, feathers of splendid maturity; fancifulness alone suits a very early age; costliness, backed by a certain uniformity and gravity, sits well on age. Colours ought to depend on complexion. Peculiarity of style is difficult and dangerous to attempt. To the painter and engraver, but above all, to the mind, which embodies the matter painted or engraved, whether by self, or others, the votaries of fashion are much indebted; but whilst we have the highest consideration for modern good taste, we would say to the studiers of dress—"Vas exemplaria graca, nocturna versate manu versate diurna." There is nothing equal to the Greek and Roman models, but as the reception in totality is impossible, the composite order of dress is the most preferable. To France we owe invention, to Greece and Rome long established perfection.